

# Ten Helpful Ideas for Teaching English to Young Learners

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*"Ten Helpful Ideas for Teaching English to Young Learners" is an article by the plenary speaker, Joan Kang Shin, in the English Teaching Forum (Vol. 44, No. 2) published by the U.S. Department of State's Office of English Language Programs. It can be found online at <http://exchanges.state.gov/forum/>.*

Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) is a rapidly growing field around the world, and English education is increasingly found at the primary levels. However, starting earlier is not necessarily the solution for producing better English speakers. Therefore, what can EFL teachers of young learners do to take advantage of the flexibility of young minds and the malleability of young tongues to grow better speakers of English? This presentation will give ten helpful ideas for TEYL that will be a good start for teachers in any primary English language program.

Young Learners (YLS) = 7–12 years old

Very Young Learners (VYLs) = under 7 years of age. (Slatterly & Willis, 2001)

<b>1. Supplement activities with visuals, realia, and movement.</b>	
Young learners tend to have short attention spans and a lot of physical energy. In addition, children are very much linked to their surroundings and are more interested in the physical and the tangible. As Scott and Ytreberg (1990) describe, "Their own understanding comes through hands and eyes and ears. The physical world is dominant at all times."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use brightly colored visuals, toys, puppets or objects</li> <li>• Community donations for toys and objects</li> <li>• Create a "Visuals and Realia Bank"</li> <li>• Use Total Physical Response (TPR) by James Asher (1977)</li> <li>• Use TPR Storytelling by Blaine Ray <a href="http://www.blaineraytprs.com/">http://www.blaineraytprs.com/</a></li> </ul>
<b>2. Involve students in making visuals and realia.</b>	
Having children involved in creating the visuals that are related to the lesson helps engage students in the learning process by introducing them to the context as well as to relevant vocabulary items. Students are more likely to feel interested and invested in the lesson and will probably take better care of the materials (Moon 2000).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students draw different characters for a story or make puppets, masks, play-do sculptures</li> <li>• Collaborate with the art teacher to make the visuals you need for you activities.</li> <li>• Students contribute their own toys for the lesson ("Show and tell")</li> </ul>
<b>3. Move from activity to activity.</b>	
Young learners have short attention spans. For ages 5–7, Keep activities around 5 and 10 minutes long. For ages 8–10, keep activities 10 to 15 minutes long. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) suggest creating a balance between the activities in the column on the right side.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quiet/noisy exercises</li> <li>• Different skills: listening/talking/reading/writing</li> <li>• Individual/ pairwork/ groupwork/ whole class activities</li> <li>• Teacher-pupil/ pupil-pupil activities</li> </ul>
<b>4. Teach in themes.</b>	
A thematic unit, a series of lessons on the same topic or subject, can create broader contexts in which to teach language, recycle language from lesson to lesson, and allow students to focus more on content and communication than on language structure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common themes for YLS: animals, friends, family, environment, citizenship, shopping, or units revolving around a storybooks, websites, celebrities, or movies students like</li> <li>• Themes based on curricula from students' other subjects are also effective (Haas 2000)</li> </ul>
<b>5. Use stories and contexts familiar to students.</b>	
Use of stories and contexts in home country or culture can help YLS connect English with their background knowledge, which is limited because of their young age and inexperience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a favorite story in the L1 and translate it into English</li> <li>• Allow students a chance to personalize content every lesson.</li> </ul>

<b>6. Establish classroom routines in English.</b>	
YLs function well within a structured environment and enjoy repetition of certain routines and activities. Having basic routines in the classroom can help to manage young learners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clap short rhythms for students to repeat.</li> <li>• Start the lesson with song or chant</li> <li>• Add classroom language to the routines as well.</li> </ul>
<b>7. Use L1 as a resource when necessary.</b>	
Use L1 in the classroom as a resource for forwarding the learning process without becoming too reliant on it. Concentrate on building communicative skills. Save your time for the target language actually within students' reach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quickly make a difficult expression comprehensible by translating into L1.</li> <li>• Use L1 for complicated directions for activities</li> </ul>
<b>8. Bring in helpers from the community</b> <b>9. Collaborate with other teachers in your school.</b> <b>10. Communicate with other TEYL professionals.</b>	
<p><b>TEFL Community Triangle</b></p> <pre> graph TD     A["English Speaking Community (parents who speak English well, student EFL teachers from the university, high school students, etc.)"]     B["Fellow school teachers (subject/content or grade- teachers and other EFL teachers at your school)"]     C["Fellow TEYL Professionals (professional organizations, level in-service programs, or special teacher education courses, etc.)"]     A -.- B     B -.- C     C -.- A </pre>	

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